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DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD, NEA/P, AND INR/R/MR

LONDON FOR TSOU

PARIS FOR ZEYA

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FOREIGN PRESS CENTER FOR SILAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS:

SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: DEATH OF ABU MUSAB AL ZARQAWI

SUMMARY: Omani news coverage of Zarqawi's death peaked June 9, with two editorials following on June 10. The government-owned, Arabic-language daily "Oman" called Zarqawi's death "psychologically positive," but condemned the "crimes" of American troops, while the English-language "Times of Oman" ran a Reuters analysis by Fredrik Dahl. Zarqawi's death generated a heavy response in "Al-Sablah," Oman's most popular online discussion forum. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

1. On June 9, all English and Arabic-language press carried front-page agency reports on the death of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, along with the postmortem photograph. Government-owned, Arabic-language "Oman" (circ. 38,000) headlined "Rejoicing in the United States, Europe, and Israel over Zarqawi's Death," with a sub-headline that read, "Iraqi Shia Exchange Congratulations and Sunnis Compelled to Silence." A picture of Iraqi policemen celebrating in Najaf accompanied the headline, overlaid in the top left corner with the picture of Zarqawi's face in death. A second sub-headline read, "Bush Talks about a Pivotal Point, and Rumsfeld Considers it a Great Victory." Also on June 9, government-owned English-language "Oman Daily Observer" (circ. 20,000) combined front-page headlines with an inside (page 18) full page of Reuters and AFP articles and photographs, headlined "Zarqawi: From Street Thug to Most Wanted Man," with subheads proclaiming "Big Defeat for Terror Network," and "Painstaking Intelligence Work Led to Zarqawi." Alongside news of Zarqawi's death, the English-language "Times of Oman" (circ. 25,000) ran the AFP story, "Sister Grieves, Hopes for Good Successor."

BLOCK QUOTE: "VIOLENCE IN IRAQ IS NOT LIMITED TO HIM"

2. The government-owned, Arabic-language daily "Oman" (circ. 38,000) carried an unsigned editorial on June 10, "Zarqawi's Death and Violence in Iraq":

"Does violence in Iraq depend on the disappearance of certain people like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was killed in an air raid by the Americans? Or is a clash of ideology fueling the conflict? The disappearance of al-Zarqawi is psychologically positive, but violence in Iraq is not limited to him. The rest of the armed groups in Iraq are not related to al-Qaida or led by al-Zarqawi. Violence in Iraq does not depend on the disappearance of certain people, but more so on complete national reconciliation and a full withdrawal of the occupiers who recently committed horrible crimes against innocent Iraqi civilians. The Iraqi situation is worsening even with the death of al-Zarqawi. Thus, the effects of his death should not be overestimated, as if Iraq were going to recover from violence."

ONLINE: ZARQAWI AS MARTYR, VICTIM, TOOL, OR SHAM

3. Discussion on Oman's highest profile Internet discussion forum, "Al-Sablah," was heavy (5,000 hits on the topic, with 200 responses) and divided, with a slight majority (about 55%) aligned with those who called Zarqawi's death "a loss to the Islamic world" and described him as a "great Muslim and martyr," killed while "defending Muslims and their rights, which America has constantly violated by supporting Israel and interfering in the internal affairs of Muslim and Arab states." Others saw him as "a victim of wrong ideologies and a result of oppression by his own government, which pushed him from one prison to another and caused him to become successively more fanatical."

Some believed al-Zarqawi was an American invention "used as a scapegoat for all the crimes and violations that the American troops committed." Some saw evidence for this in the timing of his killing, which they alleged was used "to raise the morale of American troops and demonstrate to the world that the war is legitimate."

Opponents mocked Zargawi's "heroism" as little more than the killing of innocents, and agreeing that "Defending religion, especially Islam, does not mean killing fellow Muslims." Another response stated that "Whether or not he was an American invention is irrelevant. The important thing is that he went to Hell!"

STEWART